

BROOKLINE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

Meeting of May 6, 2020; 7 pm
Via Webex

Meeting Minutes, 5/6/2020

Commissioners in attendance: Hadassah Margolis, Felina Robinson, Elizabeth Stillman, Rebecca Stone, Meenakshi Garodia, Nicole McClelland

[Not attending: Jennifer Goldsmith, Gloria Rudisch]

Others in attendance: Caitlin Starr, Select Board Member Raul Fernandez

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

1. Review of the calendar: We anticipate the state to be closed for COVID19 until at least 5/18/2020. Brookline town elections have been postponed until June 9, 2020. Town Meeting has been postponed until late June and will only take up budget articles, with all other articles postponed, likely to November. As a result we have taken our warrant review off of our calendar until we know the new schedule.

b. Day/time for BCW meetings: Ms. Stillman indicated that she would not be able to meet on Wednesday June 3th as currently in the calendar. The Commission agreed to schedule the next meeting for Thursday, June 4th at 7:00 p.m. See annotated calendar for future dates/events.

2. Approval of past minutes (March): On a motion by Ms. Stillman, seconded by Ms. Garodia, the minutes were approved by unanimous vote.

3. Reflections/questions re: Covid-19 and women in Brookline. Commissioners noted that there has been a disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on people of color, lower-income and parenting populations, and therefore women. Ms. Garodia stated that domestic violence statistics in this time have increased across the country. Ms. Starr reported that the Brookline Roundtable on Domestic Violence has a list of resources posted around Brookline and online. This list is available through the Police, schools, the Soofa kiosks, in grocery stores, gas stations, and convenience stores. Some of these postings have QR codes for reaching the Brookline Safety Net. She further indicated that there are recorded Safety Net episodes/PSAs that are around 30 minutes long being played on public access stations. Three of these have been recorded since the advent of Covid-19 and will be posted soon. The Roundtable will meet this coming Thursday. BCW liaison to the roundtable is

Felina Robinson, and she will attend. Commissioners suggested a number of possibilities to raise with the Roundtable: 1) posting the domestic violence information in pharmacies, churches and other places women frequent; 2) Have a Brookline code word for contacting the police, as is used in other places. Ms. Starr indicated that the Brookline Police will respond to the “ordering a pizza” code. Ms. Stone asked about getting data about reports of domestic violence. Reported numbers appear to be tracked from hotline calls to city and state hotlines; can we get Brookline-specific information from those sources?

Ms. Robinson and Ms. Starr noted that Brookline does not have its own shelters and that is a concern since we send people seeking safe shelter outside of the town at the moment. Ms. Garodia offered to compile a list of local shelters and pass that on to Ms. Robinson. Ms. McClelland suggested that we use the BCW Facebook page as a place to post the resource list; Ms. Starr agreed to share that list for this purpose. Ms. McClelland also plans to post this list on other Facebook groups and townwide.

Ms. Stone said she will contact the Brookline Chamber of Commerce for information on how women-owned businesses are faring at this time. The Commission also noted that women are driving much of the volunteer work around COVID19, such as making masks (Faith Michaels) and starting a Mutual Aid organization to help people in the town. Ms. Margolis suggested that the Brookline Interactive Group (BIG) could spotlight women who are stepping up. Ms. Garodia suggested that we highlight women in Brookline who are making a difference as “Sheroes” and highlight one each week, possibly at a Zoom meeting that could also be a chance for women to gather virtually for mutual support. Ms. McClelland pointed out that women are buried under work and without childcare, and that we should be careful about adding work or burdens. Ms. Stone agreed and wondered about the audience for something of this kind at this time. She noted that MassNOW has done some very similar meetings online and asked what value we would add? Commissioners liked the idea of having a Brookline focus and the chance to reimagine Brookline through a women’s lens. Ms. McClelland said, for instance, we could help shift paradigms around school, childcare, and work and have panelists who are futurists who will help us envision things differently. Ms. Margolis asked how we would deliver the information. Could we record it and link to our Facebook page? Ms. McClelland suggested that we look into Town Halls as well highlighting local women as current ‘Rosie the Riveters’. Ms. Robinson, Ms. Margolis and Ms. McClelland offered to research these possibilities and follow up on this agenda item.

Ms. Robinson also asked how we might obtain data on women-owned businesses that are closed permanently as a result of Covid-19. Mr. Fernandez suggested that we contact Kara Brewton, Town Director of Economic Development. Ms. Starr also suggested speaking with Meredith Mooney, the long term planner in Economic Development. Ms. Brewton and Ms. Mooney both serve on the Small Business Committee, chaired by Mr. Fernandez, which has loans available and has a meeting scheduled later this week. Ms. Robinson and Ms. Stone will attend the meeting and report back. Ms. Stone says she will talking with the Brookline Chamber of Commerce and follow up with Ms. Brewton and Ms. Mooney as well.

4. (7:50 pm) Discussion and Possible Vote on Options for Celebrating Women Who Inspire Us in lieu of a live event: Due to COVID19, we will not be able to have a live event, so the BCW is hoping to combine elements of the event into a video with some help from the Brookline Interactive Group (BIG). We will ask the winners to record themselves reading their essays. We will enlist some help from Ms. Thato Mwosa (BIG and BHS teacher). Ms. Stillman will contact Ms. Mwosa and ask about timing in light of the school year ending in June and being able to get help from students in Ms. Mwosa's classes. Our goal is to have the video done around the time the school year ends. Ms. Stillman, Ms. Stone and Ms. Garodia will work on this and report back at the June meeting.

5. (8:05 pm) Check-In/Updates: Elections and voting by mail: how are people getting the information? Is the town disseminating it to voters? Some commissioners have received postcards to their residences (by residence, not name). The Commission noted that abbreviated in-person poll hours will run from 12-8 pm as opposed to 7 am-8pm in the past. The Commission also noted that most of the poll monitors in Brookline are older individuals and wondered if the Clerk's office would need help/volunteers. Ms. Garodia offers to make a tutorial about voting by mail but will consult with the Clerk's office to see if that is appropriate. Ms. Stone and Ms. Robinson will attend the League of Women Voters monthly meeting the Friday after this meeting (which will focus on this issue) and Ms. Stone will follow up with Betsy DeWitt from the LWV about these issues.

6. No new business was raised. The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m.